

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASUNCION 0807

FOR ARA/APU

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PFOR, PA

SUBJECT: JEJUI AFFAIR: TROUBLE FOR PARAGUAY WITH CATHOLIC
CHURCH

REF: ASUNCION 0647; ASUNCION 0546

1. THREE WEEKS FOLLOWING A COMBINED POLICE AND MILITARY RAID
ON A CATHOLIC CHURCH-SPONSORED AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE/
COMMUNE AT JEJUI (IN WHICH TWO AMERICAN WERE AMONG THOSE ARREST-
ED - SEE REFTELS) IT APPEARS INCREASINGLY LIKELY THE GP
BLUNDERED BADLY, AND KNOWS IT.

2. WHILE THE REASONS FOR THE RAID ARE NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR, IT
APPEARS THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY UNHAPPY
WITH A TREND TOWARD PRIVATELY-SPONSORED ECONOMIC-SOCIAL GROUP
EXPERIMENTS IN THE RURAL AREAS WHICH, BEING AT VARIANCE
WITH SIMILAR GOP PROGRAMS, HAVE UNWELCOME POLITICAL OVERTONES.
SINGLING OUT JEJUI FROM AMONG SOME 160 SIMILAR PROJECTS SCAT-
TERED ABOUT THE INTERIOR WAS PROBABLY DUE TO THE IDENTITY OF ITS
LEADER, FATHER MACIEL, WHO IS REGARDED AS AN EXTREME LEFTIST
BY THE GOVERNMENT AND, IN FACT, HAS BEEN EXPELLED FROM OTHER
PARISHES FOR HIS EXTREME ANTI-GOVERNMENT POSITIONS. SUSPI-
CIONS THAT THE JEJUI COMMUNAL EXPERIMENT WAS ACTUALLY SOME
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SORT OF DISGUISED COMMUNISM WERE PROBABLY FANNED BY THE REFUSAL OF FATHER MACIEL AND HIS FLOCK TO PERMIT VISITS BY LOCAL POLICE, POLITICAL AND EDUCATION OFFICIALS.

3. ANOTHER POSSIBILITY SUGGESTED PRIVATELY TO US BY OPPOSITION RADICAL LIBERAL (PLR) FORCES (WHO ARE THEMSELVES SEEKING TO EXPLOIT THE ISSUE AND HAVE MOUNTED A VITUPERATIVE PRESS CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE GOP) IS THAT THE COOPERATIVE WAS UNCOMFORTABLY CLOSE TO A RANCH USED BY A HIGH-LEVEL GOP OFFICIAL IN ILLEGAL CONTRABAND OPERATIONS. A THIRD VERSION IS THAT LOCAL MERCHANTS WITH CLOSE TIES TO THE GOVERNMENT RESENTED THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE COOPERATIVE'S MARKETING SCHEMES WHICH COULD CUT INTO THEIR PROFITS.

4. THE RAID HAS STIRRED UP A HORNET'S NEST OF PROTEST, PRINCIPALLY FROM PARAGUAY'S CATHOLIC CHURCH LEADERSHIP, INCLUDING ARCHBISHOP ROLON THE BISHOP IN WHOSE DIOCESE JEJUI IS LOCATED, MONSEIGNEUR MARICEVICH. DENUNCIATIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTION HAVE BEEN READ FROM ALL PULPITS AND THE PRESS HAS PUBLISHED SEVERAL CHURCH COMMUNIQUEES DENOUNCING THE GOVERNMENT AND THE CONTINUED DETENTION OF JEJUI CLERICS AND PEASANTS. THE CHURCH IS CURRENTLY PUBLICIZING ITS EFFORT TO SECURE A WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS FOR THEIR RELEASE.

5. CHURCH-STATE RAPPROCHEMENT, UNDER THE SKILLED GUIDANCE OF THE PAPAL NUNCIO, HAD ALREADY BEEN DEALT A SEVERE BLOW IN THE AFTERMATH OF HARSH MEASURES TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE NOVEMBER ASSASSINATION PLOT. MANY OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT THE CURRENT ISSUE, UNLESS RAPIDLY RESOLVED, MAY PLACE THE STATE IN DIRECT CONFRONTATION WITH THE CHURCH.

6. SO FAR, THE GOP HAS OFFERED NO CONVINCING PROOF THAT THE JEJUI COOPERATIVE WAS ENGAGED IN ANY SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES. PRIVATE ASSERTIONS TO US BY INTERIOR MINISTER MONTANARO THAT A WEAPONS CACHE WAS DISCOVERED AT JEJUI HAVE NOT BEEN SUBSTANTIATED; AND THE GOP TO DATE HAS ISSUED NO PUBLIC EXPLANATIONS FOR THE RAID NOR HAS IT ANSWERED THE CHURCH COMMUNIQUEES.

7. IN FACT THE REGIME TO DATE SEEMS TO BE UNABLE TO DECIDE HOW TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM, WHILE GIVING SIGNS OF INSENSITIVITY TO THE INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF ITS ACTIONS AND CONFIDENTIAL

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OF HARDENING OF ITS POSITION VIS-A-VIS THE PARAGUAYAN CHURCH. IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT IF THE ISSUE IS NOT QUICKLY RESOLVED TO THE SATISFACTION OF CHURCH AND GOVERNMENT, THE PRESTIGE OF LEADING GOP OFFICIALS AND OF THE CHURCH HIERARCHY WILL BECOME SO COMMITTED THAT BOTH WILL FIND IT EXCEEDINGLY DIFFICULT TO BACK OFF THE CONFRONTATION.

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